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**NAVAL WAR COLLEGE
Newport, RI**

**When the “West” Meets Islam: Cultural Issues and Considerations
for the
Regional Combatant Commander**

By

**Michael A. Trabun
LtCol USMC**

A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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Abstract

Understanding the influence of historical and religious cultural factors and their influence on how to plan and conduct campaigns at the operational level of war are key determinants of success for the planning and conduct of operations in future conflicts in the Arab core of the Middle East. Joint Force Commanders must understand and develop and implement plans that account for the Islamic view of its relationship to non-Muslim cultures, the historical roots of tensions with its own leaders and the growing influence of the West, the competition between multiple religious sects for influence among the society; the unifying role of religious beliefs, laws, and practices in governance; the influential role of religious leaders; the Islamic view of warfare; the competing quietist and radical traditions; and the competing views of fundamentalist versus reformist movements in Islam.

To account for the influence of history and religion among Arab Islamic cultures, commanders must ensure that the proper leaders are engaged, and institutions, policies, and processes established that accommodate the central role of Islamic holy law in both the public role of civil government and the private lives of individual Muslims. Meaningful assessments of Arab Islamic culture must identify the prevailing religious sects in the region, historical tensions with other ethnic groups or religious sects, and the customary or historical roles they fulfill within the society. Rules of engagement that do not inflame the historical perceptions or misperceptions of the West must be developed, and forces must be thoroughly trained to recognize and understand cultural sensitivities. In order to inform the populace of the joint force's objectives, a robust and continuing information operation must be implemented, and a Civil Military Operations Center must be established and fully integrated into all aspects of the joint forces operation.

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‘Cultural Intelligence’ is the greatest initial need of the commander on the ground, and the one that leads him into more problems.

Gen. Anthony C. Zinni, USMC

INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

Sociologist and author Samuel Huntington has argued that international politics may have “moved out of its Western phase and its centerpiece become the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations.”ⁱ There can be little doubt that the strategic environment confronting the United States has become increasingly complex. With an expanding scale and frequency of military intervention, the scope of military operations has likewise broadened to include a robust and continuing presence in the Middle East and greater Southwest Asia. Efforts in this region are no longer centered on containing an ideology of communism, or engaging a foe whose capabilities and doctrines were largely based on a Soviet model so familiar during the Cold War. These efforts now include a spectrum of military operations other than war, seeking to increase regional stability through efforts that include nation building, preserving the balance of power among governments who serve the interests of the United States, and expanding the influence of democracy throughout the region.

As we narrow our focus to the military element of national power as a frequent and principal means by which the United States exerts its influence throughout the Middle East, it becomes obvious that the use of military power in attaining such objectives is not without risk. For the American citizen, the attacks of September 11, 2001, literally brought home the realization that conflict in the Twenty First Century would increasingly involve a different kind of adversary, one whose beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors are largely unfamiliar to both the leadership and citizenry of this country, and perhaps more significantly, the civilian and

military leaders who must translate policy into an effective military strategy that will support the attainment of operational and national strategic objectives.

In his work *The Clash of Civilizations?*, Huntington asserts that the “great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict in this ‘new phase’ of world politics will no longer be primarily economic, or primarily ideological. It will be cultural.”ⁱⁱ In the U. S. Central Command geographic area of responsibility, the implications of key components of Arab Islamic culture have proven to be operationally significant. In a post Saddam Hussein Iraq the United States and its allies have been confronted by serious challenges as they seek to lead nation building efforts by winning the hearts and minds of Iraqi nationals, establishing some form of pluralist federalism that meets the needs of the ethnic and sectarian segments of the population, as well as encouraging outside investment and economic development in a manner that will both sustain development and assuage Iraqi fears of U.S. domination.

In Iraq, a failure to completely assess and understand implications of the historical underpinnings and religious components of Arab Islamic culture on the operational level of war is evident as U.S. forces achieve tactical military success against insurgents, but deepen sectarian divisions among Shi’ites and Sunnis who seek to gain their fair share of wealth and power. To the Iraqis, the U.S. authority appears to have no coherent concept for dividing power equitably among Iraq’s ethnic and sectarian factions. Moreover, the U.S. appears to be involved in an effort to rebuild Iraq in its own image, attempting to solve problems with traditionally Western solutions, and appointing and depending on Iraqi leaders who have little real influence and credibility in the eyes of their countrymen.ⁱⁱⁱ

The challenges faced by the United States Central Command and coalition partners as they attempt to establish order, stability, and manage a multiethnic and multi-sectarian culture in

Iraq typifies the operational challenges the United States will continue to face as it seeks to create an environment conducive to the attainment of our national strategic objectives in the Arab Middle East. Joint Force Commanders have not garnered sufficient cultural intelligence or developed and implemented plans that account for the Islamic view of its relationship to non-Muslim cultures; the historical roots of tensions with its own leaders and the growing influence of the West; the competition between multiple religious sects for influence among the society; the unifying role of religious beliefs, laws, and practices in governance; the influential role of religious leaders; the Islamic view of warfare; competing quietist and radical traditions; and the competing views of fundamentalist versus reformist movements in Islam.

In the paragraphs that follow, general elements of culture are identified and discussed in order to serve as a useful framework in assessing culture as a subcomponent of the factor Space as part of the operational commander's estimate of the situation. Focusing on Arab Islam and the U.S. experience in Iraq as a base case, an overview of Arab Islamic culture and the roles that history and religion play in governance, warfare, and society at large is presented. The historical and religious elements of this culture that have implications for accomplishing theater strategic and theater operational objectives are assessed, and recommendations and conclusions are presented.

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

For the regional combatant commander, a comprehensive method of viewing and assessing key elements of a culture may help to answer questions such as the enemy's will to fight, the willingness of populace to support insurgents or friendly forces, and the implications that cultural considerations may have on the health, welfare, and morale of friendly forces.^{iv} In

order to gain a sufficient understanding of the role that culture plays in conflict and an adversary's way of war, one must first establish a working definition of the term "culture."

Webster defines human culture as "the total pattern of human behavior and its products embodied in thought, speech, action, and artifacts and dependent upon man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations through the use of tools, language and systems of abstract thought."^v In his 1944 work *An Essay on Man*, the philosopher Ernst Cassirer presents a model which describes six categories within a culture that serve to transmit what Webster defined as this "total pattern of human behavior:" science, language, history, religion, art, and myth. While each of these categories plays an important role in defining Islamic culture, a complete discussion of each of the categories is beyond the scope of this paper. However, when analyzing the cultural make-up of Arab Islam (and its relationship with the West), the central role of religion, and the historical roots of Arab Islamic distrust of and anger toward the West yield useful insight for the operational commander.

THE IMPACT OF ISLAM IN THE THEATER OF OPERATIONS

The religion of Islam is woven throughout all of the cultural components which define the Muslim identity. In order to discern the operational implications of engaging Islamic opponents and allies, commanders must understand the major sects which make up Islam, the influence of the major Prophet Muhammad, the role of holy law and religious leaders in Islamic society, the relationship between religion and government, and the waging of war. Commanders must also understand how Islamists view themselves, their relationship to one another, and their relationship to the rest of the world; relationships which have important cultural as well as geographic distinctions.

Islam is one of the three great monotheistic religions of the world and was founded by the Prophet Muhammad who lived from 570-632 C.E. Comprised of approximately 1.4 billion members, Muslims make up the world's second largest religious grouping. Muslims tend not to see nations divided into religious groups, but a religion that has been divided by former imperial masters into the Western concept of nation states. Arabs consider themselves the core of Muslim nations since they were the originators of Islam and spread it throughout the world,^{vi} and those Muslims who are Arabs also draw both a cultural and geographic distinction between themselves and other Muslims. However, the vast majority of the world's Muslims are non-Arabs.

THE MULTI-SECTARIAN NATURE OF ISLAM

Within the religion of Islam there are two basic sects—the *Sunni* and the *Shi'a*—which create challenges for the operational commander. The nature and role of holy law, the authority vested in the religious leaders, and the degree of influence within the society pursued by either sect requires careful analysis in order to develop means for dealing with such challenges. The split between Sunni and Shi'a has both religious and political implications with historical roots that reach back to the question of who would succeed the Prophet Muhammad as the leader of the Muslim community. The Sunni, who make up ninety percent of all the world's Muslims, believe that the Qur'an finalized and perfected the revelation of divine guidance and therefore no one could succeed Muhammad. Within the Sunni sect there is no traditional hierarchy of religious authority, nor is there the priesthood per se. However, professional men of religion known as *ulema* fill influential roles in the society as teachers and scholars whose duty it is to uphold and interpret the holy law.

In contrast to Sunni Islam, where no one man may hold more religious authority than the other, Shi'a Muslims believe that certain Muslim men are vested with the qualities of inspired

and infallible interpretation of the Qur'an. Thus, divine guidance is accessible through these 'agents' or 'doctors' of the law who have the exclusive right to interpret the holy law and make religious rulings.^{vii} The degree of influence that senior clerics have among their fellow Shi'ites can create significant operational risk, and this "emergence of a priestly hierarchy and its assumption of ultimate authority in the state is a modern innovation and the unique contribution of the late Ayatollah Khomeini of Iran to Islamic thought and practice."^{viii}

A by-product of colonialism, previous Iraqi governments were historically dominated by the Sunni minority in spite of the fact that Shi'ites represent sixty to sixty-five percent of the country's total population. In a post-Saddam Iraq, the Shi'ite majority is determined to regain their share of power and influence historically denied to them. As Shi'a clerics are empowered to issue religious rulings or declarations (known as *fatwas*) that believers are bound to abide by, the attitudes, the behaviors of Shi'ite Muslims, and the influential roles that may be played by key Shi'a clerics is a critical operational factor that must be assessed. In Iraq, underestimating, ignoring, or overlooking the Shi'ite desire to acquire real power alienated a majority and may have increased the influence and social capital of extremists (such as the radical cleric Moqtada al-Sadr) who dominate the information war in many segments of the society. That Shi'ite clerics issue guidance under the aegis of religious rulings or mandates gives them a greater degree of influence that is difficult to counterbalance from the West or through more secular or moderate leaders.

THE INFLUENCE OF THE PROPHET MUHAMMAD

Within Islamic culture the life story of the Prophet Muhammad holds great significance. As both a messenger of God and earthly example of the faithful Muslim, the attitudes, values and behaviors represented by Muhammad form the model which all good Muslims are called to

emulate. Muhammad's life was also marked by both social and political significance as he successfully opposed and eventually deposed the reigning pagan oligarchy and ultimately became both the religious and political head of a state. These two phases of the prophet's career form the inspiration for two traditions in Islam: the one authoritarian and quietist, the other radical and activist.^{ix}

Although the moderate or quietist leaders advocate a passive and civil resistance to changes viewed as contrary to the holy law or ways of Islam, those who advocate a more active or violent resistance to perceived threats are often successful at portraying quietists as both ineffective in bringing about change, or as traitors to the faith. Moreover, although the more moderate Muslim groups abhor violence and accuse militants of misusing, abusing, or manipulating the "real" Islam, the worldwide conflicts in the name of Islam and the visible successes that the radicals have registered often make them far more credible in the eyes of the Muslim masses than their quietist adversaries. Commanders must therefore determine the prevailing outlook of the leaders within the society, the extent of their following, their objectives and interests, and the likelihood of their cooperation or resistance to the joint force.

THE ROLE OF HOLY LAW

Within Islam, the sacred law, or *shari'a* is the common thread that binds all elements of Islamic society and provides extensive guidelines that pertain to the duties of the ruler and the subject, the acquisition and exercise of power, and the nature of legitimacy and authority. "In the universal Islamic polity as conceived by Muslims, there is no Caesar, but only God who is the sole sovereign and the sole source of law. Muhammad was his prophet, who during his lifetime both taught and ruled on God's behalf."^x As a result, the relationship between government, religion and society within Islam is vastly different than the traditional separation

between church and state that is so familiar to Western secular democracies. In the context of bringing security and stability to a region, or in the broader sense of civil-military operations to support nation building efforts, this intertwining of church and state in Arab Islamic culture complicates the establishment of what (in the Western view) are normally secular institutions of government. As such, it makes identifying the proper leaders within a society of paramount importance to the commander's estimate, and creates challenges to the development of policy and processes that accommodate provisions of the holy law and ultimately, gaining and maintaining the popular support of a people.

Regarded by Muslims to be firmly based on divine revelation, the Shari'a is derived from four main sources: The *Qur'an*, which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad; the *sunna*, or the practices of the Prophet as enshrined in the traditions of what he said, did, or permitted; the *ijma*, or the consensus of the Muslim community or its leading scholars; and the *qiyas*, or the analogical deductions from the first three sources.^{xi} The Shar'ia is not codified or uniform and in Shi'a sects is subject to the interpretation of the ayatollahs and mujtahid who are recognized in their authority to issue *fatwah* based on the on the holy law. Subject to such human interpretation, it may be misinterpreted or consciously manipulated creating greater operational challenges and risk. To counterbalance the referent and information power held by clerics, commanders must develop an effective rapport with leaders from each of the religious sects whom they hope to influence, and execute a robust information operations campaign throughout all phases of any operation in the theater.

ISLAM AND THE NON-MUSLIM WORLD

To many in Islam, the non-Muslim world is viewed as constant threat to the Muslim religion and way of life. Though not implying that Islam is in a perpetual state of conflict with

non-Muslims, to understand the Arab Islamic view of its relationship with the Muslim and non-Muslim world can be useful to the regional combatant commander by providing insight into the various roles that outside (and in particular non-Muslim forces) may play, the context and methods by which they may interact with the Arab culture, and the circumstances under which resistance may be reasonably expected or avoided. Furthermore, understanding this relationship will assist in the development and analysis of friendly and enemy courses of action, and may assist in analyzing or predicting how an Arab Islamic society may react to joint or coalition forces operating within the region.

In the traditional Islamic view, and based solely on the premise of culture, the outside world is seen as divided into two parts: An inner part, or *Dar al-Islam* (House of Islam) and an outer one constituting the *Dar al-Harb* (House of War). *Dar al-Islam* includes those areas wherein Muslim governments rule and Muslim law prevails. *Dar al-Harb* is comprised of the rest of the world, and is inhabited and ruled by non-believers, or ‘infidels.’ A useful analogy is provided by Bernard Lewis who notes: “In the Arab view the world appears like a fruit that consists of three parts. At its core is the kernel, the most valuable part: this is the Arab world. Surrounding it is the flesh of the fruit: the Muslim world, enveloping the Arab core like a protective covering. Outside is the skin, the non-Muslim world, whose very existence testifies to the inscrutability of the ways of Allah.”^{xii}

Muslims profess tolerance of other faiths and are willing to accept and live with the non-Muslim world so long as it does not try to devour the “fruit of Islam” itself. However, the outside world being what it is, and given this Arab Islamic view of the outside world, war is thus seen as a universal and inevitable aspect of human existence. Though some radical Islamic fundamentalists, through their erroneous interpretation or purposeful manipulation of holy law

may portray Islam as both intolerant and outwardly hostile, in the traditional view of Islam the use of force by Muslims is sanctioned by God in order to preserve the Muslim faith and Muslim principles. Conducting operations that fall within the framework of Islamic ethics of war and peace becomes of critical importance to the operational commander in order to enhance security of the force by mitigating against the growth of radicals or insurgents, to preserve legitimacy of the force by minimizing real or perceived threats to the Muslim way of life, and to aid in developing rules of engagement and other boundaries of restraint in the application of force.

THE ISLAMIC VIEW OF WAR

The Prophet Muhammad was both a ruler and a soldier and Islamic ethics of war and peace are derived from the same general sources upon which Islamic law is based. Though not dissimilar in many ways to the laws of armed conflict followed by the West, within the law, experience, and teachings of Islam, the assumption remains that some types of war are permissible or even required by God and that all other type of violence are therefore forbidden. Wars waged to solve petty squabbles among rival foes, or to seize territory or material wealth are viewed as illegitimate. However, wars against unbelievers, or wars fought to suppress internal rebellion are viewed as legitimate. Because holy war is an obligation of the faith, it is elaborately regulated in the Shar'ia. Fighters in a jihad are enjoined not to kill women, children, and the aged unless they attack first; not to torture or mutilate prisoners, to give fair warning of the resumption of hostilities after a truce, and to honor lawful agreements.^{xiii}

The Islamic concept of war against unbelievers (or *jihad*) is widely misinterpreted by those in the West. The term *jihad*, (literally translated as “striving” or “effort”) has two connotations: A “moral striving” or one’s personal effort to be a faithful and devout Muslim; and “an armed struggle,” or a war fought against unbelievers. “The object of jihad is generally

agreed to be the subjugation of hostile powers who refuse to permit the preaching or practice of Islam. Unfortunately the idea that 'Islam' and the 'West' represented monolithic and mutually antagonistic civilizations persists to this day."^{xiv} In the context of an armed struggle, jihad is taken up only to defend the Muslim's divine right to practice the tenets of their religion and most legal scholars agree that the object of jihad is not the forcible conversion of unbelievers to the Islamic faith.

The distinction between offensive and defensive warfare in Islam also has important implications for the operational commander. In offensive warfare, jihad is an obligation of the Muslim community as a whole and may therefore be discharged by volunteers and professionals who are organized and thus perhaps more easily distinguished as combatants. In defensive warfare, jihad becomes the obligation of every able-bodied individual.^{xv} This can be operationally significant when attempting to assess the likelihood of members of an Arab Islamic society to become insurgents, and the possible reactions to combat or peace enforcement operations.

Postwar fighting in Iraq was initially assumed to be primarily carried out by Ba'athist remnants and some foreign fighters loyal to the old regime. Resistance in Fallujah and Najaf, however, is primarily carried out by Shi'ites in obedience to fatwahs compelling followers to engage in what is portrayed as a legitimate defensive struggle against unbelievers who want to control cities with religious significance and subjugate the people who inhabit them. As every able bodied individual may be difficult to distinguish from professional fighters or organized volunteers, this likewise creates challenges for developing rules of engagement that effectively distinguish between combatants and non-combatants, and increases operational risk.

THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS IN ISLAM

To effectively enable security and stability in a theater of operations, commanders must be able to identify key members and leaders within the society and devise culturally acceptable methods to support and empower them in order to maintain stability and achieve objectives. Given the competing Traditionalist and Reformist movements within Arab Islam, this can confound both planning and execution.

Traditionalists or “Fundamentalists” generally urge passive adherence to literal reading of the scriptures and do not advocate a change of the social order, instead focusing on reforming lives of the individual and the family. Though fundamentalists may be quietist or radical, in the contemporary sense, Muslim fundamentalists tend to actively resist any influence from the West and its forces. Reformists or “Islamists” believe that Islamic tenets are compatible with such modern values as freedom and democracy. They are forward-looking, interpretive and often even innovative in their attempts to reconstruct the social order.^{xvi} Within Islamic culture, therefore, there exists tension between those fundamentalists who seek to resist modernization and advocate a return to the most traditional interpretations of the Shar’ia, and those reformists who believe that Muslim culture can modernize and adapt with a changing world while preserving and adhering to the immutable tenets of the Islamic faith.

Though the West (and in particular the United States) is often seen as the target, Islamic fundamentalism is more accurately viewed in both its religious and historical context as “a reaction to the experiences of colonialism, the search for an authentic Islamic identity, and the failure of both capitalism and socialism to create prosperous and just societies in the Muslim world.”^{xvii} However, fundamentalist movements are not inherently anti-Western. There is a fundamental mistrust of government built into the Islamic culture, and conspiracy theories hold

great sway throughout the society. However, “their critique is in the broadest sense societal. The Islamic world in their view has taken a wrong turn. Many of its rulers who call themselves Muslims abrogated the holy law and adopted foreign infidel laws and customs. The only solution for them is a return to the authentic Muslim way of life, and for this the removal of apostate governments is an essential first step. The hostility toward the West by many Islamic groups is aimed not at democratic values but at Western domination and interference in the domestic affairs of those countries. Fundamentalists are anti-Western in the sense that they regard the West as the source of evil that is corroding Muslim society, but their primary attack is directed against their own rulers and leaders.”^{xviii}

From the political point of view, Islamic fundamentalist movements may be sponsored by a government in pursuit of its own political purposes, or they may be characterized as genuine popular movements instituted at the grass roots level. From the theological point of view, they can be divided into two groups: Movements rooted in Sunni Islam are based on strict adherence to the Qur’an and sunnah and more conservative versions of the Shari’a. Movements rooted in Shi’a Islam tend to rely much more on the personal authority of the Mujtahid or ayatollah who are seen as authoritative interpreters of the law. Most Shi’a movements are seen as revolutionary, while Sunni movements can be either conservative or revolutionary.^{xix}

The task of identifying and garnering the cooperation of key leaders within Arab Islamic society is arguably the center of gravity for creating a secure and stable environment within which all other operational objectives may be accomplished. Compounding this problem is the Arab Islamic view that “most if not all of the Muslim rulers whom we in the West are pleased to regard as our friends and allies are regarded as traitors, and much worse than that, apostates by many if not most of their own people.”^{xx} In Iraq, many who cooperate with the U.S. and

coalition forces are seen as doing so for their own benefit. To achieve greater success and develop legitimacy within the society, commanders must be careful not to choose leaders who fit a Western model of beliefs, behaviors, and attitudes, but support reformist leaders chosen from within the society and devise methods of establishing security and stability that enable such leaders to manage processes and lead organizations that bring about reform and preserve tenets of Islamic faith and culture while not appearing to be co-opted by the West.

THE IMPACT OF HISTORY IN ARAB ISLAM

Historical records in the Middle East begin with the arrival of Islam, and for Muslims, “Islamic history has an important religious and also legal significance since it reflects the working of God’s purpose for His community.”^{xxi} An understanding of the role of history in Arab Islamic culture provides the contextual backdrop against which one can begin to understand the sense of humiliation, frustration, and contempt for the West that create the lens through which contemporary Muslims in the Arab core view their world, and contribute to the underlying causes for the rise of Islamic fundamentalism.

The sense of humiliation that figures prominently in Arab Islamic culture stems from a three hundred year decline of Islam. According to Bernard Lewis, “the Islamic world lost its dominance and leadership falling behind both the modern West and the rapidly modernizing orient. The result is a widening gap that has created both practical and emotional problems for which the rulers, thinkers, and rebels within Islam have yet to find effective answers.”^{xxii} Arab Islamists, who viewed themselves as the sole custodian’s of God’s divine truths, found themselves dominated and exploited by the West; first as a result of colonialism, and more recently in economic or military terms.

Today, “Islam is facing a belated renaissance that has been denied to it due to competing geopolitical realities,”^{xxiii} and the deep sense of frustration felt by Arabs is a result of their perceived failure of Western ideas and concepts to bring about lasting economic and social change in the region. For many Arabs, modernization in politics yields poor results with, Western-style parties and parliaments invariably ending in corrupt tyrannies maintained by repression and indoctrination. Ironically, one of the longest standing governments in the region was Iraq’s Baathist party, which was based upon a mixture of both the Nazi and Soviet Socialist models of government. The residual effects of such a regime have created an environment wherein it becomes difficult for nation building efforts to succeed without thoroughly preparing for protracted operations to achieve longer term operational and strategic objectives. An institutionalized failure to exercise initiative, a deep seated paranoia and mistrust of secular authority, and wide spread nepotism seriously impede efforts to establish control and generate stability throughout the Arab Middle East.

Underlying Arab hostility and contempt also hampers efforts in the theater and is a result of the closer ties with the West that exposed Muslims to what they consider to be the moral degeneracy and consequent weakness of Western civilization. Armed with a new confidence and sense of power as a result of oil wealth, the hatred and contempt evoked in some Muslims is exacerbated by what they view as American duplicity in its involvement in the Middle East: continued support for Israel, patronage for the Shah of Iran, and the betrayal of Iraqi Kurds and Shi’a whom the U.S. had promised to support and persuaded to take risks at the conclusion of Operation DESERT STORM. Iraqi resentment of U.S. failures to provide security and quickly restore infrastructure after the fall of Baghdad has likewise played heavily to historically rooted Arab fears and frustrations, the view of the U.S. as self-serving and hypocritical, as well as the

perception that solutions will continue to be improvised using Western models and with Iraqi leaders of questionable loyalty and motives.

In the eyes of many Arabs, Western values are considered to be morally inferior and degenerate and they view the residual effects or influence of interaction with the West as moving their society further away from the true path of Islam. The deep seated feelings of humiliation, frustration and contempt have given rise to Islamic fundamentalist movements which pose serious threats to the stability of the region. As such, commanders must understand the historical roots of such feelings when developing estimates of the situation and courses of action. “There remain a significant numbers of Muslims with whom we share basic cultural, moral, social and political beliefs and aspirations, and there is still a significant Western presence—cultural, diplomatic and economic—in Muslim lands, some of which are Western allies. But there is also a surge of hatred.”^{xxiv}

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATIONS

Understanding the cultural factors and their influence on how to plan and conduct campaigns at the operational level of war are key determinants of success for the planning and conduct of operations in future conflicts in the Arab core of the Middle East. The United States will increasingly find itself engaged in the Arab Middle East where cultural biases and ethnic and sectarian divisions make the establishment of security, stability, and nation building efforts exceedingly difficult. “In many cases the United States and its allies will be fighting nations or terrorist/extremist movements with hostile ideologies, different cultural values, and societies operating on the margin of poverty with limited practical ability to function as modern economies.”^{xxv} Regardless of their expertise in military issues, an operational commander who is ignorant of or discounts the importance of the historical views or religious beliefs of the

predominant culture can “strengthen his enemy, offend his allies, alienate his own forces, and antagonize public opinion.”^{xxvi}

As T. E. Lawrence noted, “The beginning and ending of the secret handling of Arabs is unremitting study of them.”^{xxvii} Joint forces must therefore develop and implement the means to engage the most powerful segments of Arab Islamic society while also addressing the needs of minority sects in order to prevent future conflict. Planning staffs must cultivate strong area expertise and access recent practical experience in order to conduct thorough cultural assessments. In making the commander’s estimate of the situation, it is insufficient to simply estimate an order of battle of Islamic militants or assess their tactics. It is precisely because religion is intensely personal for all Islamists that it can be the primary destabilizing social factor, especially when the attempts of any force or organization are perceived to trivialize, control, or destroy it.^{xxviii} Therefore commanders must understand the diverse power of the religion itself for “Islam is not only a matter of faith and practice it is also an identity and a loyalty—for many, an identity and a loyalty that transcend all others.”^{xxix}

As the recent experience in Iraq has indicated, understanding the historical roots and outcomes of previous interactions with the United States and the West, and identifying the influential leaders in a society is a critical component of establishing security and stability. To account for the influence of history and religion among Arab Islamic cultures, commanders must ensure that the proper leaders are engaged, and institutions, policies, and processes established that accommodate the central role of Islamic holy law in both the public role of civil government and the private lives of individual Muslims. In order to identify and empower key leaders who will have the have credibility, authority, trust, and capability required to support attainment of operational objectives, a meaningful assessment of Arab Islamic culture must identify the

prevailing religious sects in the region, historical tensions with other ethnic groups or religious sects, and the customary or historical roles they fulfill within the society. Through the proper tasking of Intelligence collection the philosophy of the religious leaders and the level of popular support may be more accurately assessed and understood. To preserve legitimacy and guide the exercise of restraint, rules of engagement must be developed that do not inflame the historical perceptions or misperceptions of the West, and forces must be thoroughly trained to recognize and understand cultural sensitivities. Finally, a robust and continuing information operation must be implemented in order to inform the populace of the joint force's objectives, and a Civil Military Operations Center must be established and fully integrated into all aspects of the joint forces operation.

END NOTES

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- ⁱ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?," Foreign Affairs, Summer (1993): 1.
- ⁱⁱ Ibid.
- ⁱⁱⁱ Anthony H. Cordesman, Iraq and Conflict Termination: The Road to Guerrilla War?, (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2004), 5-7.
- ^{iv} Paul M. Belbutowski, "Strategic Implications of Cultures in Conflict," Parameters, (Spring 1996): 2.
- ^v Webster's Third International Dictionary, (Springfield, MA: Merriam-Webster, Inc. 1981), 552.
- ^{vi} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 5.
- ^{vii} David Kerr, "The Unity and Variety in Islam," in Erdman's Handbook to the World's Religions, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman, 1994), 332-333.
- ^{viii} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 20.
- ^{ix} Ibid, 11.
- ^x Ibid, 7.
- ^{xi} Norman Anderson, "The Law of Islam," in Erdman's Handbook to the World's Religions, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman, 1994), 326.
- ^{xii} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 15.
- ^{xiii} Ibid, 39.
- ^{xiv} Sohail H. Hashmi, "Interpreting the Islamic Ethics of War and Peace" 7.
- ^{xv} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 31.
- ^{xvi} Ali R. Abootalebi, "Islam, Islamists, and Democracy," MERIA Journal, Vol 3, No. 1 (March 1999): 1.
- ^{xvii} Michael J. Nazir-Ali, "Islam in Today's World," in Erdman's Handbook to the World's Religions, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman, 1994), 337.
- ^{xviii} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 24.
- ^{xix} Michael J. Nazir-Ali, "Islam in Today's World," in Erdman's Handbook to the World's Religions, (Grand Rapids: W. B. Erdman, 1994), 338.
- ^{xx} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 41.
- ^{xxi} Ibid, xix.
- ^{xxii} Ibid, 4.
- ^{xxiii} Samir Habiby "The Arab Middle East," Lecture. U.S. Naval War College, Newport, RI: 12 May 2002.
- ^{xxiv} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 25.
- ^{xxv} Anthony H. Cordesman, Iraq and Conflict Termination: The Road to Guerrilla War?, (Washington, DC: CSIS, 2004), 17.
- ^{xxvi} Paul R. Wrigley, "The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations," Naval War College Review, Vol XLIX, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 85.
- ^{xxvii} T.E. Lawrence, "The 27 Articles of T.E. Lawrence," The Arab Bulletin, 20 August, 1917: 4.
- ^{xxviii} Paul R. Wrigley, "The Impact of Religious Belief in the Theater of Operations," Naval War College Review, Vol XLIX, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 86.
- ^{xxix} Bernard Lewis, The Crisis of Islam, (New York: Random House 1994), 17.

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